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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 29th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 22 May 1992, at 4.30 p.m.

President: Mr. BREITENSTEIN (Finland)

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The meeting was called to order at 4.55 p.m.

OTHER MATTERS (agenda item 11) (continued):

PROPOSAL CONCERNING LOCATION OF UNDP AND UNFPA HEADQUARTERS (continued) (DP/1992/L.15)

1. The PRESIDENT, recalling that the agreement reached after the general discussion on the subject that the Bureau should prepare a draft decision based on informal consultations, said that the Bureau was submitting to the Council the draft decision contained in document DP/1992/L.15 which, it hoped, reflected the sense and spirit of the discussions.

2. In that connection, he had received a request from the African Group to insert in operative paragraph 2 (a) between the words "international" and "finance", the words "and regional". If he heard no objection, he would take it that that amendment was acceptable to the Council.

3. It was so decided.

4. The PRESIDENT said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council wished to adopt the draft decision, as amended.

5. The draft decision, as amended, was adopted.

PROGRAMME PLANNING (agenda item 6) (continued)

(d) ISSUES RELATING TO PROGRAMME QUALITY, IMPACT, SUSTAINABILITY, EFFICIENCY AND PROGRAMME/PROJECT AUDITS

6. Mr. EDGREN (Assistant Administrator, United Nations Development Programme), introducing the sub-item, said that he wished to clarify one point regarding the ongoing decentralization of UNDP's decision-making to the field. The objective of continued decentralization had been reiterated in General Assembly resolution 44/211 as well as in Governing Council Decision 89/20 and, most recently, in its Decision 91/43. According to that legislation, the purpose of decentralization was, above all, to bring decision-making closer to the realities of the recipient countries.

7. It was important to note that the prime objective was not to save costs but to release the creative energy of the field organization, while at the same time maintaining close monitoring and evaluation at headquarters. Part of the financial savings that would result from moving decision-making into the field would be used to improve quality control through better monitoring, advice and evaluation.

8. The first step in the process was to have good manuals and guidelines which described the programme goals of UNDP. They included the project and programme manuals and the various special guidelines and circulars that might be issued. He emphasized that those documents should indicate what UNDP was trying to achieve and not exactly how and by what means.

9. The next step was the approval process in the field office. It was important that the process should be formalized so that the experts and programme officers would have their opinions on record when a decision was taken in the local project appraisal committee (PAC). Since UNDP believed in the decentralization of authority, and hoped to increase the financial limits beyond the current $700,000, it was necessary to formalize the process so as to ensure that the proper quality controls were applied at the field-office level. It was also necessary to increase the advance information given about all projects approved by the field office in the country programme management plan (CPMP), so that headquarters could call up for review cases which were interesting from a policy standpoint without withdrawing the delegated approval authority.

10. With a gradual move towards the programme approach, it was probable that the Action Committee would, in future, review only larger programme proposals or projects with significant policy implications. It might also screen parts of country programmes which had already been approved by field offices and review evaluations and mid-term reviews (MTR), to monitor the application of approved country strategies.

11. As many delegations had stressed during the discussion on evaluation, decentralization of programme development and implementation would require a strengthening of the evaluation functions at headquarters. That was a necessary element of quality control in a more decentralized structure.

12. With regard to the role of the Governing Council in monitoring the application of its decision in the fifth-cycle programmes, it was proposed that that should be done mainly through a much-improved generation of MTRs, as well as through thematic evaluations. New guidelines would be issued for MTRs, stipulating more measurable criteria and raising specific questions relating to the themes and modalities of the fifth cycle.

13. Many members had noted that the application of a programme approach had made the country programmes much less a detailed list of projects and more a strategy statement, which made the MTRs all the more important. The field visits of the Standing Committee could also play a useful role in giving Council members a general feeling of how decisions worked in practice. As the first generation of fifth-cycle MTRs came on stream, he hoped to engage the Council in a much more thorough review of programme quality than before.

14. Some of the comments in the Standing Committee concerning staff quality had emphasized that UNDP's best operations managers should be placed in the field offices, a position which he fully supported. Since it had always been stressed that the comparative advantage of UNDP lay in its field organization, it would be necessary to ensure that the resident representatives and all the programme staff were properly prepared for the major tasks they would have to carry out. That had implications for the training of both international staff and, in particular, national programme staff, which was playing an increasingly important role. It also had considerable implications for the pay structure and the way in which field service was rewarded. He was happy to state that those matters were currently under serious discussion and review in UNDP, although there was still quite a way to go before it was fully equipped to meet the challenges of the years to come.

15. Mr. ROHNER (Switzerland) said he agreed that the mid-term reviews were going to become crucial for the entire evaluation process in the light of the new concept whereby the country programmes concentrated to a greater extent on defining strategy and the programme approach. His delegation, which was preparing a draft decision inviting the Administrator to prepare a tentative MTR timetable, had requested mid-term reviews for all country programmes. It was pleased to note that an effort would be made to engage the Governing Council more closely in such reviews.

16. Mr. ALOM (Observer for Bangladesh) said that one of the largest UNDP programmes was in Bangladesh and UNDP had long been a dependable partner in his country's continuing development efforts since early 1972. There was virtually no sector of the country's economy that did not benefit in some way from the Programme's system-wide activity. It was against that background that he wished to submit an assessment of UNDP effectiveness with regard to programme planning and management.

17. The procedures and decision-making processes used with regard to programme planning, formulation and management were cumbersome and, as a result, the system's response to national requirements was rather slow. There was also insufficient delegation of authority to the field offices.

18. In his Government's view, project evaluation should be simplified and provide general guidance only, leaving greater freedom to the field offices. It also believed that the authority for all aspects of programme implementation should be decentralized to the field level. Such decentralization should be accompanied by the redeployment of staff from headquarters to reinforce the field offices of both UNDP and the specialized agencies. Those offices should be so oriented that they could assist Governments in such matters as project identification, programme formulation, mobilization of resources and coordination.

19. Mrs. DUDIK-GAYOSO (United States of America) said that the impact of UNDP's programmes was probably one of the greatest concerns of Member States. The ability to demonstrate the impact not only of the Programme's resources but also of cost-sharing and the host country's contribution enabled Member States to contribute to the Programme and to justify the use of public money for that purpose.

20. Her delegation welcomed the manual which UNDP had issued on programme and project design and thought that the manuals and guidelines being prepared on national execution would also be useful. UNDP should assist the specialized agencies in bringing their standards and processes into line with those documents.

21. Her delegation commended UNDP on its greater use of the substantive views of resident representatives in the preparation of country programmes and on the increased dialogue between headquarters and the field generally. In that connection, however, there was a need for UNDP to build up its in-house strategy formulation capacity.

22. Her delegation was concerned that the end-of-cycle reviews seemed to have been dropped, since it considered them to be important. They should be resumed as part of UNDP's regular monitoring and quality-control activities. In addition, the central evaluation office should be strengthened.

23. Her delegation was still concerned about the delegation of authority. It requested the Administrator to provide the Governing Council with information on UNDP's experience with respect to the increased delegation of authority and would like to know whether the resident representatives were making use of the authority delegated. It would also like to know whether there had been any feedback on the subject from the field offices. No such information appeared to be currently available. Pending the receipt of such information, no increase in the delegation of authority seemed warranted.

24. In conclusion, her delegation would encourage more team building, both between headquarters and the field and also among the offices at headquarters, with a view to the exchanging of experience and the pooling of resources.

25. Mr. JASINKI (Poland) said that the Administration's continuous efforts to increase the quality of the Programme should be acknowledged. Headquarters played a leading role by providing guidelines and advisory notes which helped to generate the "creative energy" of the field establishment. The Council had become aware of that through the interviews with resident representatives and through the visits of some of its members to the field.

26. The problem was to generate such creativity on the part of the Governments and institutions involved in the cooperative effort also. There was a need for periodic events such as seminars, workshops, and training courses so as to build up the capacity to carry out sustainable development after the end of outside assistance. The sources of consultancy and advice to UNDP and national institutions should, to that end, be expanded. A directory of consultants could, perhaps, be compiled and made available to the interested parties. It was essential to measure the value of technical cooperation in the project and programme formulation process and to appraise the subsequent implementation.

27. Programme evaluation was very important and he agreed with Mr. Edgren as to the need to develop the capacity of field staff to assume expanded responsibilities. However, that was still more true in the case of national Governments and institutions in the light of the frequent turnover of staff in a period of change and transition. The methods and measures developed for UNDP staff training should be made available to national Governments for their effective use. Joint training should, as far as possible, be encouraged.

28. Mr. EDGREN (Assistant Administrator, United Nations Development Programme) replying to the representative of Switzerland, said that the Secretariat intended to circulate guidelines for the next round of mid-term reviews and would keep the members of the Council informed as to which countries were due for review in 1993 and, if possible, as to future schedules. The timing of mid-term reviews might sometimes be affected by other factors such as donor conferences, round tables and consultative groups.

29. With regard to the question of the approval level, raised by the United States delegation, the amount set as a limit was less relevant than other factors such as the progress of a pilot project around which a wider project was built. The introduction of the programme approach would involve a number of large programmes whose structure, shape and total cost would naturally require decisions at the headquarters level, but the implementation of those programmes, and decisions on the different elements and tranches, would be handled by the field offices.

30. With regard to feedback, UNDP was about to start a major exercise of reviewing the whole institutional memory of the Programme and the way in which all field experience was fed into it. The exercise could be carried out in a number of ways, and advice was being sought as to the best method to use. It should be possible to report back to the Council on the question of feedback in 1993.

31. The United States delegation had asked about end-of-cycle reviews. They were still being carried out but were currently handled by the field offices. As they fed into the next cycle, many of them had been used as a basis for the fifth-programming cycle. A report would therefore be made available to the Standing Committee in time for its next discussion of mid-term reviews and evaluation.

32. The PRESIDENT said that the Council had completed its discussion of agenda item 6. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council wished the item to be transmitted to the Drafting Group for the preparation of draft decisions.

33. It was so decided.

MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL IN 1993 (agenda item 12)

34. Mr. GRAISSE (Secretary of the Council) said that, in accordance with past practice, dates had been established with the United Nations Conference Service for the 1993 meetings of the Governing Council, all of which would be held in New York. The organizational meeting and special session would be held form 16-19 February and the Standing Committee for Programme Matters would meet from 20-23 April and 7-10 September.

35. The High-Level Committee on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC) would meet from 24-28 May, immediately before the fortieth session of the Governing Council, which would be held from 1-22 June. The High-Level Committee would also meet for one final day during that session to approve its report. Parts of the reports requiring action by the Governing Council would be submitted to the Council during the session, and an item on TCDC would, in any event, be on the agenda for the session.

36. As 1993 was a budget year, there would be fewer country programmes for consideration. Consequently, after assessing the service requirements of the Budgetary and Finance Committee and to the other subsidiary bodies, the Secretariat had decided that a three-week session should be possible, plus one day for adopting decisions.

37. The draft provisional agenda had been drawn up on on the basis of previous decisions and practices of the Governing Council, especially decisions 81/37 anmd 92/2 on biennialization and triennialization. There would be no high-level segment, unless otherwise decided, but a general debate would be held under item 2 on the annual report of the Administrator and programme-level activities.

38. Sub-items would be added and annotations prepared in the light of the decisions adopted by the Council at its current session and the relevant resolutions and decisions adopted by the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly and, possibly, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). There might also be other matters requiring consideration at the organizational meeting in accordance with rule 8 of the Council's rules of procedure.

39. The provisional agenda for the fortieth session of the Governing Council, which would also be reviewed at the organizational meeting in February 1993, would be:

"1. Opening of the session and adoption of the agenda;

2. Annual report of the Administrator for 1992 and programme-level activities;

3. Special programmes of assistance;

4. Programme implementation;

5. Programme planning;

6. United Nations Population Fund;

7. United Nations technical-cooperation activities;

8. Other funds and programmes;

9. Financial, budgetary and administrative matters;

10. Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries;

11. Other matters;

12. Matters relating to the work of the Council in 1994."

40. The provisional agenda would be submitted as a draft decision of which the preambular paragraph would read:

"Recalling its decisions 81/27 of 27 June 1981 and 92/2 of 14 February 1992;".

41. Mr. ELLIS (United Kingdom) said that the rationalization decision taken in February 1992 had been largely concerned with the biennialization and triennialization of items and had been a useful step, but much more could be done to consolidate agenda items. The Secretariat should try to take a more imaginative approach, give a more rational structure to the agenda and see if items could be grouped. A reasonable amount of time should be given to the most important items, and the Standing Committee for Programme Matters should be given a wider mandate to consider those matters in the broader sense, in the informal setting it had succeeded in establishing.

42. Mrs. DUDIK-GAYOSO (United States of America) suggested that, in view of the Council's decision to consider, on the penultimate day of its current session, the list of reports requested with a view to their possible reduction, the item should be kept open until the list was available and it could be seen whether any of those reports might be grouped together.

43. On the question of country programmes, a good deal more information on their implementation in the coming year would be extremely useful and would allow delegations to comment on them in the general debate. There might also be time for informal consultations with the Assistant Administrator in the Standing Committee, which would also save time.

44. The PRESIDENT said that, according to the tentative schedule, the list of reports would be discusssed on Monday, 25 May 1992. The Secretariat would have to be consulted as to the possibility or the need to keep the agenda item open until that time.

45. Mr. ROHNER (Switzerland) said that the number of programmes to be presented at the February 1993 session of the Council would determine its length. The Council might, also, for example, have to consider at the organizational meeting the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) with a view to a more substantive discussion at its June session.

46. Lastly, in spite of past complaints, particularly by smaller delegations, about the planning of three simultaneous meetings, the failure to complain at the February 1992 meeting had resulted in a lower than usual attendance in the Standing Committee at the current session. The Secretariat was therefore requested to make sure that, in future, there would be not more than two meetings held simultaneously in addition to any informal discussions, so as to avoid frustration.

47. Mr. MORALES-CARBALLO (Cuba) endorsed the comments of the representative of Switzerland and also agreed that the Council should, in accordance with its earlier decision, have an opportunity to discuss the list of reports. Moreover, in view of the flood of items being transmitted to the Drafting Committee, it was to be hoped that some information on the reports would be given well in advance. Lastly, he wondered why no high-level segment had been planned for 1993.

48. Mr. GRAISSE (Secretary of the Council) said that the Secretariat, which was in the hands of the Council, would be delighted to have fewer reports and agenda items. It would provide the Council with a list of the reports for

consideration in 1993 at its next meeting. The Council could then decide whether the list was a reasonable one or not. In so doing, it should consider whether a decision it had taken requesting a report would remain valid if the report concerned was subsequently cancelled.

49. The representative of the United Kingdom had suggested that the Secretariat should take a more imaginative approach to the agenda. In his own opinion, it should not be necessary to have two separate items on programmes, but they had been established by the Council in its Decision 81/37. At its organizational meeting in February 1993, the Council might wish to review that decision.

50. In reply to the representative of Switzerland, he said that, at its February session, the Council would probably have to consider post-UNCED resolutions and any restructuring decisions taken by the Economic and Social Conncil and the General Assembly. There might also be matters to discuss in connection with the senior management structure cf UNDP itself. There was currently no list of country programmes for consideration in 1993, but the Secretariat would try to make one available by Monday, 25 May 1992.

51. The Secretariat sympathized with the position of those delegations which found it difficult to cover more than two simultaneous meetings. However, it was for the Council to decide whether it wished to complete its session in three weeks, in which case, with a particularly heavy agenda, there would sometimes have to be three parallel meetings, or whether it wished to extend its sessions and keep to two parallel meetings.

52. With regard to the question asked by the representative of Cuba, the Council had, in 1991, decided to hold a high-level segment every two years; consequently the next would be held in 1994.

53. Mrs. DUDIK-GAYOSO (United States of America) said that the purpose of reviewing the list of reports was to consolidate rather than eliminate them, as a way of streamlining the agenda. Assistance to the newly independent States in Eastern Europe was also likely to be on the agenda for the February meeting. In view of the decision, taken in February 1992, to use the organizational meeting to find ways of rationalizing and streamlining the agenda, she hoped that the Secretariat would have some useful suggestions to make in that regard.

54. Her delegation was concerned that the four days allowed in February might not be enough to cover all those matters. The Secretariat might therefore bear in mind the need to consult delegations in New York with respect to the possibility of extending the session when a full estimate of the work and number of country programmes had become available.

55. The PRESIDENT said he endorsed that proposal. On that understanding, he took it, that the Council wished to approve the dates of the sessions and draft agenda for 1993.

56. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.